

Livelihood and Natural Resources: A Socio-Cultural Study of the Paraja Tribe of Koraput District, Odisha, India

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Abstract: *The nexus of Paraja tribes with their natural resources is complex, extending from time immemorial to the present day and beyond. Parajas are traditionally cultivators and partly rely upon NTFPs and MFPs to supplement their livelihood. Natural resources play a requisite role in the life of the Parajas, especially the lands and the forest. They have learnt to co-exist over time with the nature and therefore their livelihood is primarily natural resource (NR) based. They have shifted their livelihood towards daily wage labour to give a helping hand to their livelihood as the crop land resources remain the same while the family size have increased over time. The paper is an attempt to analyse the socio-cultural dimensions of natural resource based livelihood of the Parajas. The present study is empirical and based on primary source of data, to conduct the research; field work was carried out at Balda village of Koraput district in Odisha state. Observation, schedule and interview are the central research techniques executed to collect the field data. purposive sampling method was executed followed by snowball sampling. The paper also stationed to analyse agriculture as a culture of the Parajas and the cyclical nexus among natural resource, knowledge and culture.*

Keywords: Agriculture, livelihood, natural resource, Paraja tribe

1. Introduction

Livelihoods mean the type of jobs and lifestyles people lead to earn a living. Robert Chambers, who described livelihood as comprising of the capabilities, assets and activities required for a means of living as well as the interaction between assets and transforming processes and structures in the context that individuals find themselves in (Corney, 1998). In India, the livelihood practices among tribal communities are complex, dynamic and is a multidimensional phenomenon, whose perception varies with geographic location, type of community, age, gender, education, fluctuations in resources, services and infrastructures and social, cultural, ecological, economic and political determinants (Kumar et. al., 2009). Agriculture, as a culture constitutes main source of livelihood among tribes in India, which plays a vital role in national economy, rural development, employment and occupation, agripreneurship, food and nutrition security, growth and survival, social, economic and cultural conditions and poverty alleviation. Approximately 70% of the tribal population mainly depends on rain fed agriculture characterized by low productivity, uncertain weather and calamities, degraded soil with low fertility, tough irrigation and degraded natural resources (Chakraborty et. al., 2009). These factors aggravated the problems of poverty, migration, unemployment, underemployment, food insecurity and malnutrition for millions of tribal people in India (Mourlin, 2007). The capability of agriculture and livestock production to form sustainable livelihoods of tribal poor is in continuous decline because the current overall endowments of production, distribution of productive assets and productive abilities are out of alignment with what is needed (Mourlin, 2007). Ultimately, the tribal people are dependent on forests or natural resources.

More than 25% of world's population rely upon forests for their livelihood forests as they are renewable in nature. Forestry is the second largest land use in India after agriculture covering 21.02% of the total geographical area of the country (Anon., 2011). A wide spectrum of livelihoods for tribal communities in the form of direct employment, self-employment and secondary employment is provided by forests.

The tribals of the scheduled areas partially rely upon the natural resources to obtain their livelihood. Hence, they are self-employed and earn their livelihoods through the sale of minor forest products (MFP) like fodder, grazing, lopping and grass cutting, forest based handicrafts and cottage industries, sericulture, lac cultivation (resin production), bee keeping, charcoal burning, leaf plate making, liquor making, rope making and basketry, medicines, collection, processing and marketing of Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), cultivation of agricultural crops under agro-silvicultural practices, livestock rearing, social and farm forestry and rights and concessions. The application of local skills and availing of village-level technology in wood-based and small-scale forest-based enterprises provide secondary employment and livelihood opportunities for tribal people, for example; wooden boxes, bamboo and cane products, agricultural implements, structural wooden items, musical instruments (used during festivals and other rituals), bidi making, educational goods, wood carving, wooden utensil. Forest development integrated with agricultural and industrial progress has great potential to enhance livelihood security, poverty reduction and food security for vulnerable section of society including illiterate, unskilled, resource-poor, jobless, landless and labourers in rural and tribal India.

As the availability of land remained the same while the size of the families have increased and due to the preference of traditional technologies rather than modern technologies has

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lead to lower production from agriculture and forests. Hence, the tribals derive most of their livelihood from the manmade resources, but natural resources plays a significant role in their socio-religious dimension. Most of the tribes earn their living either through agriculture or daily wage labouring. Since the land available to each family has remained the same and the number of family members has increased, supporting all of them through agriculture alone is becoming difficult. So the tribes now a days are migrating to urban areas in search of livelihoods, but these are also not always available partly because they lack the skills and educational qualifications, turning them out as wage labourers. This movement of tribes towards urban areas in search of livelihood results in "tribal-urban continuum".

The government is addressing these problems by taking steps to make better farming techniques to increase crop production from the same piece of land, and also making other opportunities of employment and livelihood available close to or within the villages to initiate a sustainable livelihood development.

2. Balda study village: A profile

The studied village is located 28 kilometres from the district head quarter, Koraput. The village lies 8 kilometres away from the national highway-26 (NH-26) which connects Raipur-Vizianagarm, is 483 kilometres. Navy Armed Depo (NAD) is located at the north-eastern side. The village is predominantly inhabited by ST Community and a very few people from general community are seen. The road of the village is concrete and there is a canal which separates the two *sahi* (*upara sahi* and *tala sahi*). The village has an Anganwadi centre and a primary school. All the children prefer to study in their village school and after completion of primary schooling they prefer migrating to outside schools for their higher secondary education.

Table 1: Gender and community Wise Distribution of Village Population

Particulars	Total Population	ST	General	Others
Male	178	146	16	16
Female	168	144	11	13
Total	346	290	27	29
H.H's	96	76	09	11

Table 2: Prevalence of livelihood resources and activities

Resources	Sl.no.		Resources	Activities
Resources	1	Natural	Arrack	Production, consumption and distribution of <i>salap</i> , fermented rice (<i>chauli</i>), and <i>landa</i>
			Hills	Stone collection, cultivation, collection of medicinal plants
			Forests	Collection of NTFPs and MFPs, medicinal plants for ethno-medicinal practice by (<i>disari</i>), hunting, fruit collection
			Agricultural land	cultivation, livestock farming
			River	Fishing and sand collection
			Animal husbandry	Raising of livestock and poultry, cultivation, miching, manure production for fertiliser, consumption of poultry
	2	Manmade	Business	Shopkeeping
			Artisans	Stitching and craft
			Market (<i>haat</i>)	Barter system, buying and selling
			Pension	Old-age and disability pension
			KV school	Peon, unskilled wage labouring

Objectives:-

- To study the prevalence of livelihood resources wise activities
- To study the socio-cultural aspect of natural resources and livelihood

3. Methodology

The methodology has been precisely qualitative as well as quantitative in nature. Primary data has been used for collection of authentic information. During field work, focused group discussions (FGDs) was arranged to collect information regarding the village issues like origin, history, beliefs and religious practices.

Purposive sampling technique was followed for the selection of households. The women of the houses were given more emphasis as they were mostly engaged in NTFP collections, and are strongly connected with the traditional use of forest (natural resource) as compared to men. The main tool used in the study was schedule; consisting of general and specific information and snowball sampling. In addition, techniques like ethnography, interview, observation (direct, indirect, participant and non-participant) is used to study the livelihood resources of the natives. The information collected was tabulated and later analysed.

Justification for selection of the study area

- Natural resource and tribal livelihood high dependency ratio and the impact of forest products in socio-economic and cultural life of the study area.
- Study area is surrounded by mountains and a river and prevalence of manmade resources are significant from which they earn their livelihood.
- Low level of literacy rate.
- Adopted village of Central University of Odisha, Koraput

4. Results

The entire data was collected, compiled, analysed and tabulated and they were organized both qualitatively and quantitatively. To carry out the study 76 households were selected on the basis of purposive sampling procedure. The total 76 household's accounts for total population of 290 and the average family size is 3.81. All the sample households belong to Paraja tribe.

	HAL	Electrician, unskilled wage labouring
	Local towns	Unskilled wage labouring
	CUO	Security guards
	Vehicle	Auto and bolero driving on hire
	Politics	Sarapanch and ward member
	Anganwadi	Anganwadi worker
	SHG	Deposition and transaction of money
	Kitchen garden	Cultivation for self consumption
	NAD	Gardener, skilled and un-skilled wage labouring

From the above table-2, the researcher observed that despite of the valuable resources, these natives remained as “resource rich poor”. Most of the livelihood activities are derived from the manmade resources and hence the natives are more dependent on manmade resources while partly rely upon natural resources. Since the land available to each family has remained the same and the number of family members has increased, supporting all of them through agriculture alone is becoming difficult. So, natives are moving to towns and cities to earn a livelihood, but these are also not always available partly as they lack the skills and academic qualifications. The Parajas earn their livelihood from the nearby municipality or town area pioneering a “tribal-urban continuum”.

Table 3: Management of natural resources

Types of natural resources	Natural resources
Common	Grazing land, forest, river, well, medicinal plants
Real estate	Crop land, livestock, poultry, trees, arrack trees

From the above table-3, it is evident that grazing lands has been seen among the Parajas along with river and forest. A common well also has been installed by the Government for the natives. Crop land, livestock, poultry and trees belong to private resources.

Table 4: Status of NR based livelihood activities with annual income

Actively earning groups	Annual income
Disari (ethnomedicene)	65000
Cultivation	60000-150000
Animal husbandry	20000
NTFP and MFP collection	10000
Arrack	20000

The given table-4, manifest that cultivation livelihood provides the highest earning while the ethnomedicene livelihood having the lowest. A seasonal collection of NTFPs and MFPS supplement their livelihood.

Table 5: Status of actively earning population from total population of sample study

Actively earning groups	Population	%		
		Total	NR	Manmade
Shop keeper	1	65%	72%	28%
Disari (ethno medicine practicer)	3			
Cultivators	63			
Skilled Wage labour	06			
Poultry and livestock managing	29			
Electrician	01			
Politician	02			
Unskilled wage labour	47			
NTFP and MFP collection	37			
Total	189			

From the above table-5, it is evident that out of the total population of the Parajas, 65% of them are actively earning for their livelihood from which 72% is extracted from natural resources and the rest 28% is derived from manmade resources. So it is very evident that the maximum Paraja tribes of the studied area rely upon the natural resources for their livelihood.

Socio cultural aspects of natural resources and livelihood

The Parajas are a part of the nature and use the natural resources to earn their livelihood with the help of their cultural knowledge. So here knowledge plays an important role in earning livelihood. Moreover, we can say resource, knowledge and livelihood acts in a cyclical way. This cultural knowledge of resource utilization of Parajas to extract livelihood is hereditary. Knowledge helps them in sustaining the resources and livelihood helps in sustaining the knowledge and resources. So development of the three can lead to the overall sustainable development. The natives have learned the pattern of coexistence with resources/nature. The Paraja natives have common ownership of land which reflects a unique communal management of resources or we can say there is a village council to manage the natural resources.

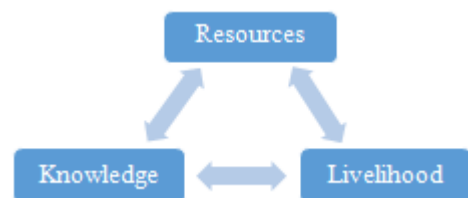


Figure 1: Cyclical relationship among resources, knowledge and livelihood

Though, now a days, the Parajas have been seen shifting their livelihood from cultivation towards wage labouring and other livelihood activities, but, still cultivation remain as their primary and main source of income. Natural resources play a requisite role in the livelihood of studied Parajas. The two main natural resources of the studied Parajas are forest and agricultural/cultivable lands. Their primary source of income rely mostly upon natural resources such as agricultural lands and forest, which signifies the co-existence of the studied Parajas with the nature. These Parajas are both culturally and occupationally linked with the forest, resulting the existence of a “symbiotic relationship” with the forest. The seasonal collection of NTFPs and MFPS helped partly to sustain their livelihood. Mostly Paraja women are attached with forest resources. In addition to it, hunting of animals, during *chaiti parab* (festival) is practiced by the native male Parajas in the forest.

Alcohol plays an pivotal role in the socio-cultural life of these tribes. They consume alcohol like mahuli (mahua liquor), landa (mandia liquor) and salap (palm liquor). Alcohol traditionally considered as one of the daily diet and part of their routine to them, but now the native Parajas have become conscious and have abided themselves from daily consumption of alcohol. But still, it has a significant role during the life cycle ritual and local festivals (*parab*). the alcohol is offered to the goddess and from that a drop of alcohol is being tasted to the new born baby on his/her 21st day (*eksia*). Similarly during marriage ceremony alcohol is regarded as a honorary offering. The Parajas observe a string of festivals during which all the Parajas irrespective of gender consume alcohol and perform desia dance (*dhemsa*) during night.

The studied area is surrounded by hills which is best suited for Parajas to reside. Their village **shrine**, located back in the forest hills of their village, where the sacrifice of buffalo, goat, sheeps, pig are performed during the festivals, signifies socio religious values.

The expansion of Kerandi river across their cultivable lands, on one hand, has engulfed their crop lands and snatched their primary traditional livelihood out from them, on the other hand fishing becoming a newly adopted livelihood activity to them.

Beside cultivation, these tribes supplement their livelihood by animal husbandry. They raise poultry and livestock which partly help in maintaining their livelihood during crisis. Livestock like bullocks, buffaloes and cows are used for cultivation and milching purposes. Sheeps and goats are raised for the purpose of commercialization. During festivals they sacrifice hen, goat, pig, buffalo at the village shrine located back in the hill-forest.

Agriculture: A culture of the Parajas

Agriculture of crops is not just a livelihood activity for these native Parajas, rather it holds many significant cultural beliefs of them. Land is the prime source to them from which they derive their livelihood. They cultivate finger millets (*ragi*), paddy, *alasi*, various vegetables in their kitchen garden, and tomatoes on lands, *suau* (*Echinichloa frumentacea*), pea-nuts and mustard using very simple agricultural equipments. Since their traditional and central livelihood is cultivation and it holds cultural taboos, agriculture can be defined as a “culture” to them.

During *bandapana parab* (August - September) they worship the agricultural lands and sacrifice hens and pigs on the land and jet the blood on the land to make the land fertile. On this day the Paraja cultivators cook and eat on the same land.

Another socio-cultural taboo is that after harvesting, while fetching the crops back to the house, all the windows and doors of the house are remained open and a lamp remains lightened till the crops reach the house and the person bringing the crops is restricted for talking to any other till the crops reach the house.

5. Case study

To know the cause of changing pattern of their livelihood, the researcher initiated a case study. The researcher interviewed an old man named Pratap (pseudo name) of aged 63 years (pseudo age). The interviewee informed that all the natives had crop lands but they were alienated due to establishment of NAD (navy armed depot) and Kerandi river. He revealed that NAD camp alienated most of their crop lands and the expansion of the river engulfed their crop lands too. The natives have also displaced from their origin habitat due to the expansion of the river and hence the natives named their first place of living as flood area (*budhi anchal/ badhi anchal*). The natives were neither rehabilitated nor given any compensation.

6. Discussion

Natural resources, both terrestrial and aquatic, play a requisite role in the life of these tribes. The studied Parajas have the knowledge to co-exist with the nature, so that cultivation is their prime source of livelihood followed by seasonal collection of NTFPS and MFPs as a supplement. The inversely proportional relation of crop land resources with family size has initiated a dynamics in their livelihood i.e. emergence of daily wage labour as a major livelihood practice; the dynamics of livelihood has been possible due to the increase employment opportunities in the local manmade resources. Land and forest are the two major NR of the studied Parajas signifying unique socio-cultural dimensions of livelihood and natural resources that highlights agriculture as a culture and explain the co-existence of the Parajas with forest in a bio-social concept of Symbiosis, in which both the Parajas and the forest are interdependent on each other for their existence.

7. Recommendations

- Focus on Marketization of NTFPs and MFPs.
- Adoption of strategic modern cultivation technique to meet more production of crops.
- Schemes for maximum utilization of aquatic resource.
- Intervention required by ITDA, OTLEP, FADP
- Vocational education to the Parajas for skill development.

8. Conclusion

The studied Parajas remain as the resource rich poor despite both terrestrial and aquatic natural resources are handy. In addition, the expansion of local cities and the intervention of Government for installation of various factories are providing daily wage labour to them to some extent. Natural resources like forest is both socio-culturally and socio-economically interdependent with the Parajas and have developed a symbiotic relationship between them over time. Here culture and knowledge play a prime role in conservation and utilisation of natural resources framing a cyclical nexus among them. most of their livelihood is based on NR. Cultivation which is regarded as the central livelihood of these Parajas carry many cultural beliefs and taboos and hence agriculture evolved as a unique culture of the Parajas.

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